

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 OMB-01 AID-20 NIC-01 OPR-02 SY-04 EB-11 SWF-02

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FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

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C O N F I D E N T I A L COLOMBO 1691

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PINT, CE

SUBJ: UNITED FRONT EASES UP ON SRI LANKA OPPOSITION PARTY

REF: COLOMBO 1279; COLOMBO 1099

1. SUMMARY: UNITED NATIONAL PARTY (UNP) ON JUNE 19 HELD FIRST PUBLIC MEETING SINCE PARTY DECIDED RECENTLY TO DROP CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TACTICS AND STRATEGY OF CONFRONTATION WITH UNITED FRONT GOVERNMENT (UFG). GOVERNMENT IS REPORTEDLY WILLING TO PERMIT RESUMPTION OF UNP POLITICAL ACTIVITY AS WELL A PUBLICATION OF SUN NEWSPAPERS AS LONG AS OPPOSITION FUNCTIONS WITHIN FRAMEWORK OF PARIL RESTRICTONS. PRIME MINISTER BANDARANAIKE APPEARS SENSITIVE TO POOR PRESS COVERAGE ABROAD OF CLAMP-DOWN ON OPPOSITION; IN EASING UP ON UNP, HER HAND IS STRENGTHENED BY NEW CONFIDENCE WITHIN UF FOLLOWING SERIES OF SUCCESSFUL PRO-GOVERNMENTY RALLIES.
END SUMMARY.

2. OPPOSITION UPN HELD PUBLIC MEETING JUNE 19, FIRST SINCE BAN WAS PLACED ON ITS MEETINGS BY GSL
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IN PARIL. WHILE OCCASION FOR MEETING (TO CELEBRATE

BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF LATE DUDLEY SENANAYAKE) WAS ROUTINE, ITS SIGNIFICANCE LIES IN ITS HAVING BEEN HELD. SECRETARY TO PRIME MINISTER M.D.D. PIERIS TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT GSL HAD PERMITTED MEETING AS TEST OF UNP'S WILLINGNESS TO ABIDE BY GSL GROUND RULES DECREED APRIL 22 FOR OPPOSITION POLITICAL ACTIVITIES (COLOMBO 1099). IN HIS ADDRESS AT JUNE 19 MEETING, OPPOSITION LEADER J.R. JAYEWARDENE MADE PRO-FORMA ATTACK ON RESTRICTIONS BUT CONCEDED THAT UNP IS "QUIET TEMPORARILY". TONE OF JAYEWARDENE'S SPEECH APPEARED TO BE IN SPIRIT OF DECISION REPORTEDLY ADOPTED JUNE 10 BY JOINT OPPOSITION TO DROP CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE TACTICS AND STRATEGY OF CONFRONTATION WITH UFG. JAYEWARDENE IS SAID AT THAT TIME TO HAVE EXPRESSED FEAR OF UNP'S BEING PROSCRIBED UNLESS PARTY ADOPTED LOWER PROFILE AND COLLER RHETORIC. HE IS REPORTEDLY APPREHENSIVE OF OFFICIAL REACTION TO REPETITION OF MAY 22 EVENTS, WHEN UNP ATTEMPT AT SATYAGRAHA WAS MARKED BY MINOR CLASHES WITH POLICE INVOLVING BATON CHARGES AND TEAR GAS.

3. PIERIS'S REMARKS TO AMBASSADOR CARRIED IMPLICATION THAT ORDELY MEETING COULD LEAD TO PERMISSION FOR FURTHER MEETINGS AND SOME RESUMPTION OF UNP'S PUBLIC ACTIVITIES. IN SAME VEIN, GOVERNMENT IS ALSO REPORTED TO BE PREPARED TO REOPEN INDENDENT NEWSPAPER (SUN GROUP) BUT ONLY UNDER RESTRICTIVE CONDITIONS SO FAR REJECTED BY OWNERS. LOCAL ESTIMATE IS THAT MRS. BANDARANAIKE'S APPARENT FLEXIBILITY TOWARD UNP MAY REFLECT HER SENSITIVITY TO BAD PRESS COVERAGE ABROAD FOR HER APRIL CLAMP-DOWN ON UNP AND TO POSSIBLE LOSS OF PRESTIGE IF SEPTEMBER MEETING IN COLOMBO FO COMMONWEALTH PARLIMENTARY ASSOCATIN IS MARRED BY DOMESTRIC REPRESSION AND DIS-ORDERS. SHE THEREFORE APPEARS WILLING TO PERMIT GRADUAL RESUMPTION OF UNP ACTIVITY, PROVIDED IT IS NEITHER LOUD NOR ABRASIVE.

4. HER HAND IS STRENGTHENED BY SELF-CONFIDENCE NOW PERVADING UF PARTIES. ALTHOUGH REPUBLIC DAY PARADE MAY 22
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WAS CARRIED OUT ON MUCH LESSER SCALE THEN LAST YEAR, BECAUSE OF OIL CRISIS AND TORRENTIAL MONSOON RAINS, CUHENT SERIES OF UFG PUBLIC RALLIES HAS BEEN MARKED BY LARGE TURN-OUTS WIDELY INTERPRETED IN GOVERNMENT RANKS AS INDICATOR OF MUCH BROADER PUDOYC SUPPORT THAN EARPLER BELIEVED. HOWEVER, WE UNDERSTAND THAT THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE ELEMENT OF COERCION IN GETTING CROWS OUT FOR THESE RALLIES. EASING OF

FOOD SITUATIO, IMPROVED ECONOMIC POSITION, AND
INCREASED UF SOLIDARITY ALSO CONTRIBUTE TO MORE BUOYANT
MOOD NOW UNTROUBLED BY ACTIVE OPPOSITION CRITICISM.

5. FOR THE MOMENT, UNP'S TACK REPORTEDLY IS TO LIE
LOW AND CONCENTRATE ON PARTY ORGANIZATION, ESPECIALY AT
CONSTITUENCY LEVEL. COMMITTEE WORK ON FORMULATION
OF PARTY POLICY, INCLUDING DRAFTING OF NEW NATIONA
CONSTITUION, CONTINUES UNABATED. PARTY SOURCES
ASSERT THAT OBJECTIVE OF ELECTIONS IN MAY 1975 HAS
NOT BEEN ABANDONED AND PREDICT REVIVAL OF PARTY
ACTIVITY IN FALL.
VAN HOLLEN

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